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Laura L. Schraeder

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Once everyone in the group orally shared his or her experience the students eagerly wrote their first drafts , using the plan sheets as guides. As I observed them, I saw confident faces reflecting heartfelt pride through occasional smiles. The plan sheets helped students organize their stories by making sure they accidentally did not omit any important details.

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Once all my students decided about what to write, I invited them to share in small collaborative groups. Why? Why didn't I just have them begin writing? I wanted to enhance everyone's security and to experience culture. Remember every group consisted of two ESL students and two mainstream students. The cultural exchange was unbelievable. As I circulated among the

groups, students shared stories ranging from the tooth fairy's first visit to first visits to Mexico where grandma uses insects in recipes. According to S. Ana Garza, education can never be in a culture-free environment (Garza, 1991). Based on the shared experiences in my classroom, I wholeheartedly agree. Everyone was learning about culture, even me. I found myself as intrigued by my students' tales as their fellow group members. I felt drawn to their storytelling like a nail to a magnet; and like their fellow group members, I, too, asked a lot of questions. By answering so many questions, my students' stories slowly took shape within the organizational framework provided by their plan sheets in a culturally driven environment. Moreover the small collaborative groups created a safe haven to exchange ideas and either add or subtract details necessary to make their story easy to understand and special. Thus, Phase II of the collaborative funnel became slightly narrower while retaining a protective aura.

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